

The Aetiology of Illness in Latin Love Elegy
Hunter H. Gardner, The University of South Carolina
gardnehh@mailbox.sc.edu

In Propertius 2.28, the *amator* laments Cynthia's illness, initially considering two causes of disease, the pestilential season of the dog-star Sirius (*sicco... Cane*, 2.28.4) as well as general atmospheric conditions; he rejects both, assigning as origin (lit. "fault"/*culpa*) her false oaths and failure to revere the gods (6-8; cf. 2.9a.25-6). Tibullus is also somewhat opaque about the origins of Delia's illness, which he claims to have remedied through his prayers, though the language he uses to describe her condition (*cum tristi morbo defessa iaceres*, 1.5.9) provocatively recalls the suffering of plague victims in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (6.1178; Putnam 1973, 101) as well as the bees beset by *morbis* in Vergil's *Georgics* (G.4.252; Maltby 2002, 244; cf. [Tib.] 3.10.10, *corpora fessa*). Ovid uses similar language to describe Corinna's poor health (*in dubio vitae lassa Corinna iacet*, 2.13.2); her weary, prostrate condition also ties her to plague victims, both those of Lucretius' Athens and the citizens of Aegina who suffer in the *Metamorphoses* (7.578-80; cf. *Met.* 15.438, *dubio salutis*; McKeown 1998, 276-8). Unlike his predecessors, however, Ovid's *amator* explicitly identifies the cause of his *puella*'s suffering, an attempted abortion (2.13.1; cf. 2.14 and *Ars* 2.315-336).

This paper examines the origins and outcomes of sickness in Latin love elegy. Attempts to situate these poems within the generic parameters of the *soteria*, while usefully highlighting Hellenistic influences, stop short of demonstrating that the elegists adhere to the requirements of the "thanksgiving for recovery" poem (Yardley 1973, 1977; Cairns 1972). I argue that representation of the *puella*'s illness as well as the lover's role in curing it should be interpreted within a wider spectrum of poetic discourses in the late Republic and Augustan periods. The elegists allude to a shared experience of sickness, using language drawn in part from the plague narratives of Latin epic: in doing so, the poet-lovers initially indicate the *puella*'s suffering within the context of epidemic disease, only to reject that *aition* and further distinguish the *puella scripta* as shaped by and responding to the genre's aesthetic and politically "heterodox" values (cf. Wyke 2002; Sharrock 1990; Keith 1994).